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# **Changing Masculinity Ideals in a Danish Context?**

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# Aim and focus

- Purpose: To localize and discuss different masculinity ideals in a contemporary Danish context:
- The Danish context: a welfare society & a gender equality regime
- → Changes in the masculinity ideals
- The processes of changes are not linear but rather characterized by both changes and continuities
- Aim: to outline the masculinity ideals that shape contemporary Danish men's attitudes, practices and strategies. The focus will be on the normative notions about the most accepted ways of being a man.
- We emphasize how these norms and ideals are constructed and expressed:
  - ❖ in the identity constructions and social interactions of individual men and groups of men at the **micro level**
  - ❖ and how these are produced in relation to ideals existing at the **macro level** of society



- Focus: the relation between masculinity (ideals and practice) and work accidents
- Cases: two branches with a high amount of work accidents: Ambulance workers (Falck) and industrial slaughterhouse workers
- HOWEVER - measuring **traditional masculinity ideals** in surveys: the men from the two branches are not very supportive of these (10 %)
- An interesting finding.... And a suitable entry for an explorative, qualitative investigation of masculinity ideals in Denmark

# Theoretical framework

## 'Hegemonic masculinity' (Connell 1995):

- 'The most valued and legitimate form of masculinity in a specific context' – regulating the behavior of individual men

*...embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men. (Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) p. 832)*

## **Two dimensions of power relations (Demetriou 2001)**

- a) External hegemony – male dominance and oppression of women
- b) Internal hegemony – hierarchical classification of masculinities

# Our main criticism

- Connell's attempt to grasp the dynamics of internal and external hegemony in one theoretical concept. was a creative theoretical move. But was is also a reduction of complexity?
- Can it be taken for granted that the form of masculinity that is normative and authoritative in a given social context (organization, nation, society, etc) is always one that secures men's privileges/dominance over women?
- We also need to look for social spaces where masculinities are (becoming) dominant and where they do not contribute to patriarchal gender relations
- Connell and Messerschmidt are clearly interested in how alternative gender-equality oriented masculinities may emerge and perhaps become normative ....but there the basic theoretical premises of the concept of hegemonic masculinity do not open up for this complexity.
- There is not always a clear whether a given form of masculinity is gender-equality friendly or not

Jf. Christensen and Jensen "[Combining hegemonic masculinity and intersectionality](#)", *NORMA: International Journal of Masculinity Studies*, Vol. 9 (1), 2014, pp. 60-75.

- A need to treat external and internal hegemony as two different dimensions – sometimes coincide and sometimes not (open empirical question)
- A need to develop theoretical frameworks and analytical approaches that can grasp the complexities in the construction of multiple masculinities emphasising changes, continuities, co-existences, negotiations and ambivalences.

# Key concepts

**.... to investigate changing masculinity ideals in a Danish context**

*Multiple masculinities*: grasping the complexities in the construction of multiple masculinities emphasising changes, continuities, co-existences, and ambivalences in contemporary Danish masculinity ideals.

*Masculinity ideals* are socially constructed gender ideals for men in a specific context emphasizing expectations for masculine behavior, attitudes and social interactions.



# Focus group interviews

- 5 focus group interviews

Stratification in:

- Geography: Copenhagen and Northern Jutland (Aalborg)
  - Educational background/class: high /low educated men
- 8-12 men in each interview (n = 50)



# 'The emotional man'

- *"Crown prince Frederik for example - it is legitimize for him to cry at his wedding in front of all the Danish TV viewers, because at the same time he has his Sirius patrol and his frogman credentials. It gives him an image of 'a whole person'. It allows him to show emotions **because** at the same time he is also defined by some ultra masculine qualities"* (Thomas, 31)
- *"You might say that he is characterized by an **appropriate** mix of emotionality ...."* (Niels, 47)

(High educated, Copenhagen)



*"A man should not cry over everything. A movie for example. Or when Bubber cried because the gun stroke back.... That's not acceptable! He is a sissy; it's simply the most unmanly!"* (Søren, 30 , low educated, Aalborg)

# ‘The male worker’

An overall ideology about gender equality in relation to the labour market. But ambivalences at the micro level:

- Robert (45): *I think that those barriers with ‘occupations for women’ and ‘occupations for men’ are being removed. I think it’s funny when I meet a female truck driver. I think that’s great! Those prejudices are worth nothing today.*
- Martin (31): *On second thought I still see it as more manly being an ambulance worker than... (...) Well, I shouldn’t flaunt it too much but I would still think so. Driving through the city at a high speed with flashing lights, saving lives – to me that is more manly than to ‘trotter’ at a hospital, being a nurse. But it is probably not the right thing to say (...) But I don’t think that it’s only me thinking so. It would be nice if it was not so – I guess that’s what we are working on – but I still feel like that...”*

(Low educated, Copenhagen)

# ‘The present father’

*“In my perspective the modern man will not put up with it only being the women who takes care of the children. The caring part of it, the more soft aspect, is also a part of the male ideal today.”*

(Henning, 57, high educated, Aalborg)

*“You cannot work 70 hours a week and still call yourself a father. You may be the father in a biological sense but you’ll not get close to your children and get an intimate relation with them (...) To be there for your children - that’s the most masculine I can think of!”*

(Sigurd, 38, low educated, Copenhagen)





# Conclusion

- At the macro level of society the gender equality discourse has a strong impact on the expression on masculinity ideals.
- The analysis confirm that dominant masculinity ideals at the macro level do not reproduce patriarchy or support traditional masculinity ideals – on the contrary...
- However, focusing on masculinity ideals at the micro level the picture get more blurred: consensus about the dominating masculinity ideals (related to gender equality) are characterized by complexity and ambiguity.
- This, in practice ambiguous masculinity ideals has been located that both support gender equality **and** masculinity ideals that support traditional gender division (patriarchy)
- The analysis identifies change and continuity at the same time....
- The analysis points to **the existence of multiple masculinity ideals** that are overlapping, competing and negotiated - both at the collective level and in the identity construction of the individual man.